

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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BUSH ADMINISTRATION ALLOWS EXPLOSIVES STOLEN IN IRAQ TO BE SHIPPED UNINSPECTED AS CARGO ON A PASSENGER PLANE

Reps. Markey and Turner Demand Action to Close Loophole

Washington, DC: Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee, along with Rep. Jim Turner (D-TX), ranking Democrat on the Homeland Security Committee, today sent a letter to Homeland Security Department Secretary Tom Ridge urging the Bush Administration to reverse its opposition to the screening of all cargo being placed on passenger airlines, in light of the recent revelation that several hundred tons of sophisticated explosives are missing in Iraq. The revelation is particularly alarming since published reports have suggested that less than 16 ounces of the type of explosives missing destroyed Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, and since packages weighing less than 16 ounces are currently not subjected to any screening requirements whatsoever.

“The same explosives that disappeared from the unguarded facility in Iraq could end up in the cargo hold of a passenger plane in the United States, because with respect to the threat from packages weighing less than 16 ounces, our passenger planes are essentially unguarded,” said Rep. Markey. “Less than 1 pound of the 300 tons of sophisticated explosives that are missing could be used to destroy a passenger aircraft, adding to the sense of urgency that the Bush Administration must immediately end its opposition to 100% cargo screening and start doing what it needs to do to keep us safe.”

On October 10, 2004 Iraq’s Ministry of Science and Technology officially reported that 377 tons of the explosives HMX, RDX and PETN from the site Al Qaqaa are gone and likely in the hands of terrorists, despite IAEA warnings to the U.S. that the sites containing these materials needed to be secured. The explosives can be used to detonate nuclear bombs, but HMX and RDX are also the key components used in plastic explosives, which have been widely used in car bombings in Iraq to kill U.S. and Iraqi forces.

Plastic explosives weighing less than 16 ounces brought down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland when terrorists planted them in unscreened baggage. The Pan Am Flight 103 bomb used the same type of explosive materials as those stolen in Iraq. Currently, TSA uses the so-called “Known Shipper” program to determine whether cargo can be transported on passenger planes or must be carried on all-cargo planes. Because the Known Shipper program relies on paperwork checks, rather than physical screening, it fails to adequately address the risk that terrorists will bring down a passenger plane using explosives hidden in cargo. However, packages weighing less than 16 ounces are not subject to even this meager measure.

Rep. Markey is the author of H.R. 2455, the USA Cargo Act, which would require physical inspection of all cargo carried on passenger planes. Last year, the House passed, by a margin of 278 to 146, an

amendment to the FY04 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill offered by Rep. Markey that would require 100% screening of cargo carried on passenger planes. Despite overwhelming support for the amendment, the Senate dropped the provision from the final version of the bill during the House-Senate conference, even after the House voted by a landslide margin of 347 to 74 to instruct conferees to the conference to keep the 100% cargo screening amendment in the final version of the Homeland Security Department's spending bill. In June 2004, Rep. Markey again offered his cargo screening amendment, which was narrowly defeated 191-211 as a result of stiff opposition from the airline industry and the Bush Administration.

"After the tragic terrorist attack in Beslan, TSA began screening cargo placed on some passenger flights entering the U.S. from Moscow," said Rep. Markey. "The technology clearly exists to screen cargo. The only think absence is any willpower on the part of the Bush Administration to do so. I believe the theft of these explosives in Iraq should be treated with an even greater sense of urgency and responded to accordingly by immediately commencing the screening of all cargo being placed on passenger airlines. Failure to do so would subject millions of Americans to unnecessary risk."

For a copy of the Markey-Turner letter, please see <http://www.house.gov/markey/airlinesecurity.htm>

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